

MALAGA ISLAND FRAGMENTED LIVES



Lesson 2: Building Visual Literacy Using Images of Malaga Island

Not only do students need to be able to read traditional texts critically, but they also need the ability to analyze visual imagery. A photograph is an important visual document that serves as a primary resource for researching our past. This lesson will help students develop skills in analyzing and interpreting images as a means to better understand people, events, eras, and large ideas in a diverse array of contexts.

Instructional Materials

- ***Lincoln on Battlefield at Antietam*** image for warm-up exercise (provided)
- Malaga Island historic image for analysis exercise
- **Photo Analysis Worksheet** (provided)
- ***Sleuthing in a Museum*** Student Reading (provided)
- Additional Malaga Island historic images

Visual literacy (noun) – the ability to interpret, understand, and create meaning from visual information, usually images (pictures) or other visual media.

Essential Questions

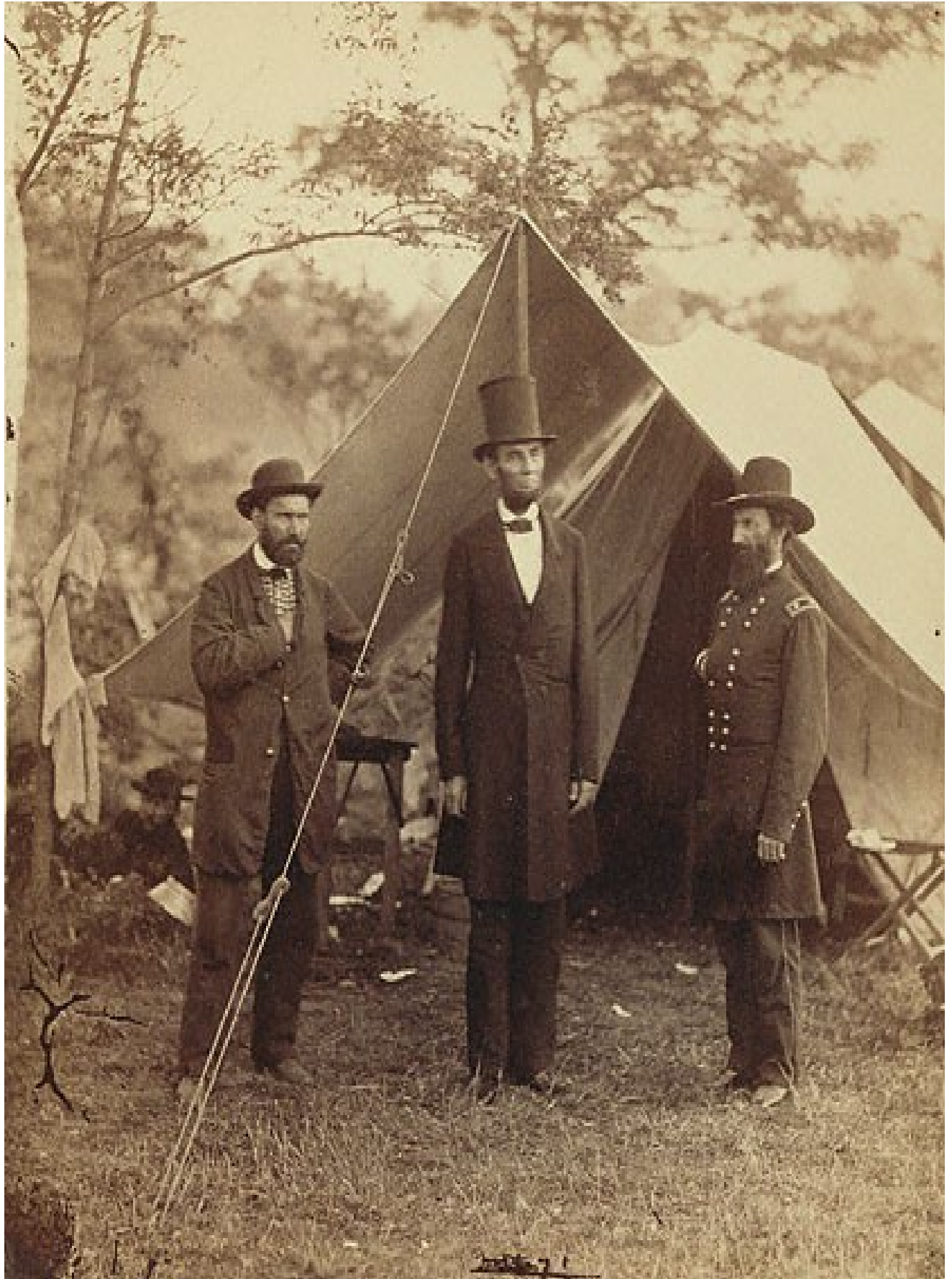
- What can a photograph tell us about a time period, place, or people?
- What do you think is the intent of the photographer?
- How can evidence be used to support an argument?
- What is the difference between observation and interpretation?
- What is a museum curator, and how do they conduct historical research?

Plan of Instruction

Visual Literacy Warm-up Exercise

- Project or hand out copies of the image of Lincoln on the Battlefield at Antietam from the Getty Museum (image below and image and label can be found on <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/104GZM>).
- The goal of the exercise is to get students familiar with the three steps of visual analysis: Description/Observation, Reflection/ Interpretation, and Questions/Research. This same approach can be used with any of the historic images of Malaga Island.
- Step 1: Description/Observation

- Have the students look closely at the image and list all of the details they see. Students should focus on clear observations of what can be seen and refrain from making assumptions or drawing conclusions about the photograph's meaning. Ask students, "What do you see? What people do you see? What objects do you see?" Encourage students to examine the entire image; the background is often overlooked but holds important clues.
- Step 2: Reflection/Interpretation
 - Next, the students use their observations as evidence to make some interpretations about the image. To guide the discussion, you can ask, "Are there clues about when this photo was taken? What is the mood in this photo? Why might the photographer have taken this photo?" Remind students to give evidence to support their conclusions.
 - Knowing the historical context for the image may alter the students' interpretations. You can provide some basic information, like "The Battle of Antietam was one of the most bloody and brutal battles of the Civil War." Then ask the students if knowing this changes their initial interpretations.
- Step 3: Questions/Research
 - Lastly, ask the students what questions they have about the image and how they would go about finding answers.
- Step 4: Share the museum label that accompanies the photograph, which may or may not answer all of the questions the image analysis raised.



Maine State Museum

***President Lincoln, United States Headquarters, Army of the Potomac,
Near Antietam***

October 4, 1862

Photographer: Alexander Gardner, 1821-1882

J. Paul Getty Museum Collection

Twenty-six thousand soldiers were killed or wounded in the Battle of Antietam on September 17, 1862, after which Confederate General Robert E. Lee was forced to retreat to Virginia. Just two weeks after the victory, President and Commander-in-Chief Abraham Lincoln conferred with General McClelland and Allan Pinkerton, Chief of the nascent Secret Service, who had organized espionage missions behind Confederate lines.

Lincoln stands tall, front and center in his stovepipe hat, his erect and commanding posture emphasized by the tent pole that seems to be an extension of his spine. The other men stand slightly apart, holding themselves carefully for the camera's long exposure. The reclining figure of the man at left and the shirt hanging from the tree are a reminder that, although this is a formally posed picture, Lincoln's presence did not halt the camp's activity, and no attempts were made to isolate him from the ordinary circumstances surrounding the continuing military conflict.

Malaga Visual Literacy Exercise

- Hand out the Photograph Analysis Worksheet to either each student or to groups of students. Explain to your students that photographs from the 1900s are not always clear and easy to see, but they should do the best they can to “read” the picture.
- A historic image from Malaga Island is provided below. Project the historic image or hand out a printout of the historic Malaga Island photograph. At this point, do not provide the students with any background information about this photograph. Let them know that their assignment is to analyze this photograph using the same steps they used in the warm-up exercise - **observation/description, reflection/interpretation, and question/research.**
- Have students proceed with analysis of the Eason Home or Island Schoolhouse photograph using the **Photograph Analysis Worksheet** (provided below). Circulate among the groups as they work to ensure they understand the process and provide encouragement. Prompts like “what’s going on in this picture,” “what more can we find?” might be helpful to encourage deeper looking.
- When they have finished with each of the observational tasks on the worksheet, they should proceed **to interpret** what they have **observed**.
- Bring student groups back together and ask them to report on how they answered the interpretive questions. Ask them about which **observations** they are using as **evidence** to support their **interpretations**. You may want to ask: “*What do you see?*” and “*What makes you say that?*” Encourage respectful discussions around conflicting interpretations; in each case, revisit the evidence that the students are citing to support their claims.
- After they have completed the visual analysis, you can assign students to read ***Sleuthing in a Museum: An Interview with Maine State Museum Curator Kate McBrien***.
- To build upon this reading, either facilitate a discussion or assign an essay that asks the following:
 - Option A: Describe what you would smell, hear, or could touch if *you woke up in the Eason home shown in the photograph.*
 - Option B: Describe what you would smell, hear, or touch if *you walked into the Malaga Island school in the photograph.*

Extension Activity 1: Have students choose another photograph from the images included with this lesson (found below) and repeat the visual analysis on their own.

Extension Activity 2: Have students choose a photograph from the images included with this lesson (found below) and write creatively, imagining themselves in the time period. Write from either the perspective of the photographer, a person in the photograph, or an object in the photograph.

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Photograph Analysis Worksheet

Observation: Look closely at the historic Malaga Island photograph provided to you and study it for two minutes. Your assignment is first to make careful observations of the photograph and record them here. Next, you will be asked to interpret the photograph in the questions that follow.

List each person in the photograph:

List objects or artifacts in the photo:

List things shown in the natural environment:

List actions occurring in the photograph:

Reflection/Interpretation:

- Can we tell if the people in the picture are related to each other? Explain what you think (your interpretation) and then use the observations you noted above as evidence to support your conclusions.
- Are there any clues in the photo about what life was like at this time for the people pictured? What is your interpretation, and which of your observations can you use as evidence to support your conclusions?
- Are there any clues about when or where this photo was taken? Don't forget to provide evidence (in the form of your observations) to support your interpretation.
- Do you think the photographer was a stranger or a friend? Explain why.
- After looking closely at this image and trying to interpret what is going on, what questions do you have? Make a list of them here:



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Sleuthing in a
Museum: An Interview
with Maine State
Museum Curator Kate
McBrien”

Q: What does a museum curator do?

McBrien: Curators are the people who are in charge of collecting, preserving, researching, and interpreting objects so they can be put on exhibit in a museum. I organized the Malaga Island exhibit.

Q: Tell us, what do we know about this photograph that was put in the exhibit?



McBrien: The photograph was taken by Herman Bryant, who was a well-known and respected photographer in the central Maine area. On July 20, 1911, he took this image of the home of John and Rosella Eason on Malaga Island. Pictured with them are two of Rosella’s grandchildren: Leonard Tripp (the older one) and Harold Tripp.

Q: How do you know when it was taken or who the people are?

McBrien: The date “July 20, 1911” and the words “Malaga Island” were the only things recorded by Bryant.

Q: Then how did you figure out the rest?

McBrien: I figured out the identity of the people by comparing the photograph to other photographs or newspaper articles where the names of the people were known. For example, Leonard Tripp is photographed and identified in a Maine newspaper article (see right).



I also looked at the census record; this is when the government goes door-to-door and counts everyone. The 1910 census of Malaga Island (detail below) shows us that the Tripp family was living with the Easons.



Q: What do you find interesting about this home?

McBrien: The Eason’s home was originally the ell or a part of a larger house on the mainland. It was floated on a raft from the mainland to Malaga Island for use as a home.

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Historic Images of *Malaga Island*



John Eason repairs a building on Malaga Island, circa 1910
Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts

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Eason House, Malaga Island, circa 1910
Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts

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Malaga Island school, July 1911
Maine State Museum collection, 96.38.178

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Students entering the Malaga Island school, circa 1910
Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts

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Interior of the Malaga Island school decorated for Christmas, circa 1910
Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts

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View from a tarpaper house on Malaga Island
looking toward the Phippsburg mainland, circa
1910. *Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts.*

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Eliza Griffin house, Malaga Island, circa 1910
Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts

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Postcard, "Malaga Island, Maine. A portion of Governor Plaisted's party landing at the harbor of "Ex-King" Murphy." Inset: "The School on Malaga", circa 1912

Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts

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Wallace family at the Basin in Phippsburg, circa 1910
Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts

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Unidentified children inside a home on Malaga Island, circa 1910
Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts

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Group of Malaga Island students, circa 1910
Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts

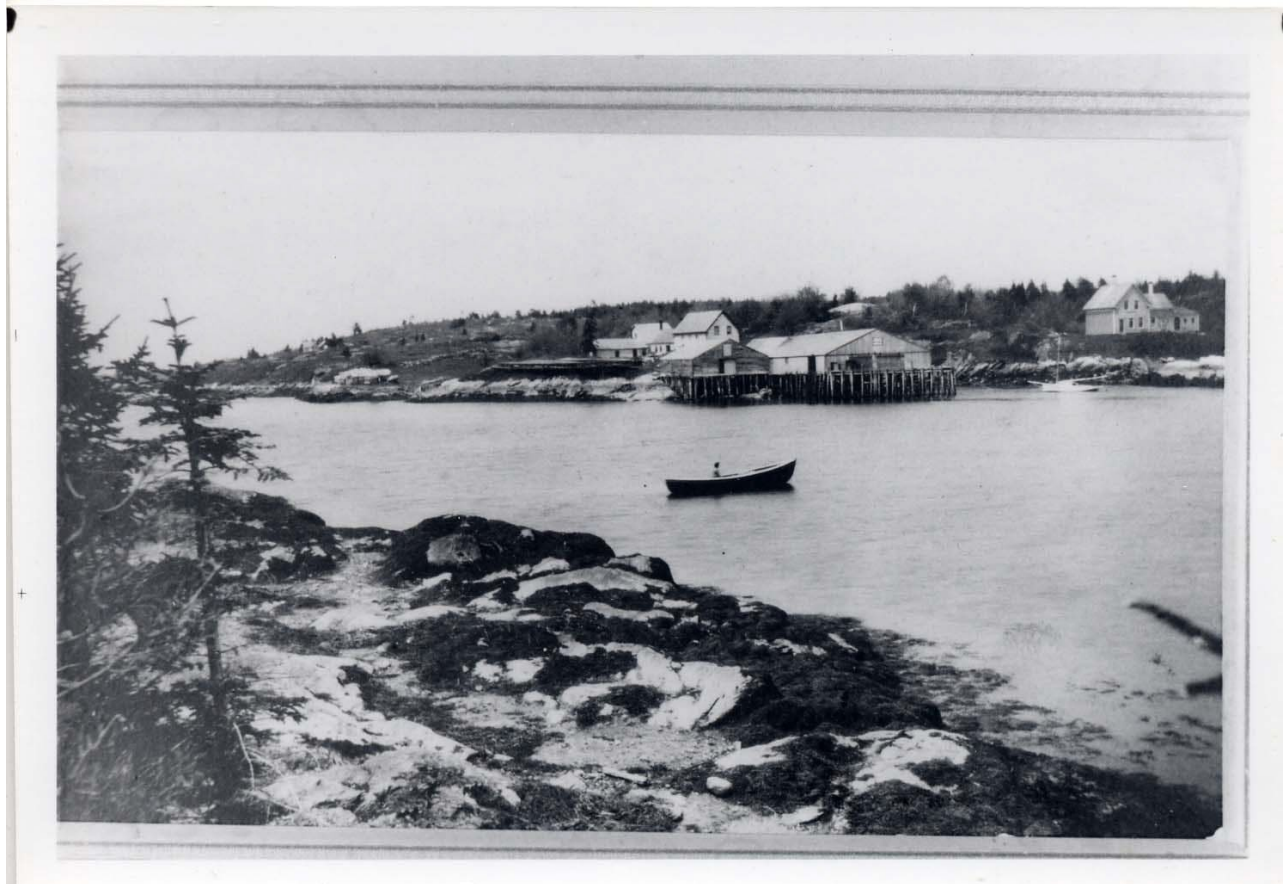
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Group of Malaga Island students outside, circa 1910
Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts

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Eastern shore of Malaga Island looking towards the Phippsburg mainland, circa 1910
Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts

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Unidentified woman with children on Malaga Island, circa 1910
Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts

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Harold McKinney (left) and Johnny Murphy (right) on Malaga Island, circa 1910
Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts

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Murphy family, Malaga Island, circa 1910
Clockwise: John Murphy, Holman Murphy, George Murphy, Louisa McKinney Murphy
Courtesy of Peter K. Roberts